



Ag Enterprise Areas Top 1 Million Acres

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Contact: Donna Gilson 608-224-5130

donna.gilson@wi.gov

Bill Cosh, Communications Director, 608-224-5020

William2.Cosh@wisconsin.gov

Editors note: Local contacts for AEAs are listed at the end of this release.

MADISON – Wisconsin will hit the 1 million-acre mark with the designation of new and expanded agricultural enterprise areas for 2015, Sec. Ben Brancel announced today at a meeting of the Board of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

The new acreage will become official Jan. 1, after Sec. Brancel signs orders creating two new agricultural enterprise areas, or AEAs, and expanding an existing one. Wisconsin will then have 31 AEAs totaling just over 1 million acres in 23 counties, 92 towns and the Bad River Reservation. The one modified and two new AEAs total about 90,000 acres in Eau Claire, Outagamie and Monroe counties.

AEAs may be created or expanded when at least five landowners, in partnership with local governments, petition the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection for the designation. They are part of Wisconsin's farmland preservation program, intended to encourage preservation of agricultural land use and to promote agricultural economic development appropriate to each area. Designation provides some certainty for farmers and agribusinesses that an agricultural infrastructure will remain into the future, so they can invest with confidence. Landowners in AEAs are not subject to any new land use regulations. Farmers owning land within an AEA can receive tax credits in exchange for signing an agreement to keep their land in agricultural use for at least 15 years.

To date, landowners in ag enterprise areas have signed nearly 490 farmland preservation agreements, covering 104,000 acres. Landowners outside designated AEAs who want to participate should work with their neighbors and local governments to petition for AEA status. Petition materials are available at datcp.wi.gov/farms.

This is the sixth round of AEA designations. The Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection has authority to designate up to 2 million acres as AEAs.

The new and expanded AEAs are:

Golden Triangle AEA, Eau Claire County

This new AEA covers nearly 21,400 acres in the towns of Washington, Lincoln, Otter Creek, and Bridge Creek, and was sought by 26 petitioners. It is largely a grain and dairy region, but with a diverse array of agricultural producers and related businesses, and with highly productive farmland that petitioners want to maintain in agriculture. Petitioners want to encourage further agricultural development that will support local ag-related business, promote small-scale agribusiness, leverage proximity to local markets, and support the local food movement.

Greenville Greenbelt AEA, Outagamie County

This AEA was originally designated in 2015, but will now be expanded by more than 4,700 acres to total 6,178 acres, all in the Town of Greenville. It is a cash cropping area on the edge of an urban area. The expanded designation was sought by 8 petitioners. Through the expanded designation, the petitioners hope to promote and support good agricultural land management and ensure successful transition of existing agribusinesses to the next generation. Recent investments in agribusinesses and the local technical college support the town's ag economy.

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AEA – ADD ONE

Scenic Ridge and Valley AEA, *Monroe County*

This new AEA was supported by 91 petitioners in the towns of Jefferson, Portland and Wells. It covers nearly 62,500 acres dominated by dairy, cash grains and forestry. Petitioners seek to promote agricultural education, business and jobs while continuing the area's historically strong conservation ethic. The headwaters of five significant watersheds lie within the AEA: Middle Kickapoo River, West Fork of the Kickapoo, Coon Creek, Upper La Crosse River and Little La Crosse River. It encompasses Wisconsin's largest organic production area which totals about 5,000 acres.

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Local contacts for 2014 agricultural enterprise areas

Golden Triangle AEA: Greg Leonard, 715-839-4784, greg.leonard@co.eau-claire.wi.us

Greenville Greenbelt AEA: Dave Tebo, 920-757-5151 ext. 4; <mailto:mdtebo@townofgreenville.co>

Scenic Ridge and Valley AEA: Bob Micheel, 608-269-8975, bmicheel@co.monroe.wi.us

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